



## Raw Milk: California's New Coliform Standard

A new law effective Jan. 1, 2008 increases California's public health and food safety standards for raw milk and other milk products. This consumer information sheet explains what the new coliform standard means with regard to the quality, safety and availability of raw milk in California.

**The new standard does not ban the production or sale of raw milk.** It sets a limit of 10 coliform bacteria per milliliter in raw milk for sale to consumers. This limit is the same as for pasteurized milk, and is consistent with public health and food safety requirements set for pasteurized dairy products by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Canadian Food Inspection Service, and the European Economic Community (EEC).

**Coliform bacteria don't belong in milk.** These bacteria are not a normal part of milk as it's made by healthy cows; they are typically introduced either by contamination during milk collection, handling and storage or, less frequently, from cows with infected udders. Coliform bacteria are normally shed in the feces of healthy livestock, including dairy cattle. Therefore, dairy producers must maintain high standards of sanitation in order to guard against fecal contamination of milk.

**The coliform standard is a measure of sanitation.** While most coliform bacteria do not cause disease, they are indicators of sanitation problems in the production or processing of milk. A small percentage of coliform bacteria, such as specific strains of *E. coli* (i.e., *E. coli* O157:H7), can cause serious illness in people—especially young children, the elderly and those with weakened immune systems.

**The goal of the coliform standard is to have raw milk produced by clean, healthy cows and processed under good sanitation.** Without the protective step of pasteurization, cleanliness and sanitation are of increased importance in the production of raw milk. Poor herd hygiene, contaminated water, unsanitary milking practices and poor equipment maintenance are the most common factors that allow feces or other environmental contaminants to come into contact with milk, leading to elevated coliform counts.

**Consistent use of proper milking procedures and effective cleaning and sanitation practices will allow for the continued production of raw milk that meets these new bacterial standards.** Regular CDFA inspections identify sanitation problems that could affect the bacterial quality of milk. The California Food and Agricultural Code calls for the restriction of products that fail to meet bacterial standards in three of the last five regulatory samples. The department collects these samples approximately once per month. Producers are informed when elevated bacterial counts are found, and official notices are written when specific products violate standards in two of the last four samples. These procedures provide ample warning to producers, and allow for cleaning, sanitation or equipment problems to be addressed before restriction of a product takes place. However, it is ultimately the raw milk producers who are responsible for assuring their customers that their milk and milk products are produced in a clean and sanitary environment.

For additional information, please contact the CDFA Office of Public Affairs at (916) 654-0462.